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Songs Of Innocence & Experience: The Music Of William Finn

By J. Peter Bergman



In thirteen songs drawn from six of songwriter William Finn's many projects, novice recording artist **Lisa Howard** presents a picture of Finn's world and mind and illuminates with talent and style the inner inspirational force of the creator of these ditties. What emerges, really, is the unique style of his work.

The stage works represented go back to 1989's *Romance in Hard Times* and *Falsettos* in 1992 and continue through *The Royal Family of Broadway* (1994), *A New Brain* (1998) and *Elegies: A Song Cycle* (2003) with two songs from 2005's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Among the best of them is "I Don't Know Why You Love Me" from *The Royal Family*... A genuine period sound pervades this minor show-stopper sung with Derrick Baskin who scats with the best. In fact all four of the songs from this show are gems. They are also the only ones that sound like another composer was involved in the work.

Finn's songs tend to become one long number without the four cited above, somewhat similar to one another. Two other exceptions to this represent the best and worst of his work. "Sailing," beautifully performed by Howard with guitar accompaniment by Matt Hinkley from "A New Brain" is one of the finest pieces in Finn's lexicon. "How to Make Delicious Chocolate Pudding" from the *Songs of Innocence*... group is a difficult, wordy, hard to comprehend monologue to music by Deborah Abramson which would have been greatly helped with a printout of the lyric. Its tale is confusing and hard to hear.

Howard's voice is both lyrical and expressive and her way with Finn's lyrics is a true gift to the songwriter's work. That this is her first CD seems crazy. She is an engineer's dream, her enunciation perfect and her acting chops sheer magic. In "Bad Boy" another *Royal Family* song, she is both amusing and cynical at the same time in a 1920's jazz idiom...not an easy combination by any stretch of the imagination.

I am a fan of Finn's best work and some of it is here. It is always fun to discover new pieces and I have on this disc and I am now a fan of Howard's work and look forward to hearing more from her in the near future.

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Lisa Howard: *Songs of Innocence and Experience, the Music of William Finn*.
Ghostlight Records CD.

by Lisa Howard/William Finn